

## Confirmation chapter 1

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Summary: Morgan faces some disturbing and strange hours, beeing lost from his team...

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### Confirmation

The sun was beating down from a clear blue sky, showering the three members of the scouting party with scorching heat as they searched through the last of the quadrant of their assigned area for the day. So far, all they had found was a small brook, which crystal clear water and rich green plant-life had been a welcome sight after hours of dusty slopes of rocks and gravel, and they had decided to make camp there. Baines made a quick report to Danziger, back at the basecamp, giving coordinates and results of the days search, while Walman and Morgan startet to set up camp. Later on, Morgan was sulkingly plodding round looking for some firewood, while the two others struggled with the tent. "Don't go to far now, Morgan!" Baines grinned: "There are lots of Grendler-tracks in the area...." Walman nodded seriously, trying not to laugh: "Yeah, lots!" Morgan just ignored their teasing, and headed for some trees up by the bend of the brook. Once out of sight from his two companions, he dropped down on the grass in the shadows of the trees, hungrily munching a root-fruit he had found. Not only had he been forced to go along on this search because it was his turn, but Danziger had signed him up with Walman and Baines on purpose! The two biggest 'comedians' of the Eden Advance Team! Morgan gave a sigh as he eased his boots of, and carefully dipped his sore feet into the cool water. "Much better." He breathed, settling himself comfortably against the tree-trunk, finishing his root. "What I wouldn't give for a cold beer, right now..." He mused, watching the clear water run silently over his feet. "I know what you'll get if you don't get off your ass, and start working!" Walman suddenly loomed over him, not looking very pleased: "No supper!" Reluctantly, Morgan got to his feet, pulling on his socks and boots, muttering to himself. "Get a move on!" Walman set a boot to Morgan's behind, and pushed him on. Stumbling, Morgan scowled back at him, but did as he was told, not wanting to

miss his meal. He followed the riverbed, stacking small piles of dry twigs and branches along the way, to pick up on his way back. Lost to his own thoughts of indignation and self-pity, he forgot about time, and soon found himself quite a distance from the camp, where the brook made a ninety degrees turn westward, creating a small pond at the bend. Morgan jumped from rock to rock, over to the more barren east-side of the brook, soon finding himself overlooking a steep-hilled, sandy basin amidst all the green. It seemed like a recent landslide had just cut the basin out of the side of the ridge. Here and there, the sun scorched remains of toppled trees stretched their gnarled wooden fingers towards the sky through the sand which had spilled out for miles. Morgan shivered. Definately not a place worth his time. He was about to turn back, when a blink of metal caught his attention on the other side of the dunes. What was that? He straightened his back, shadowing his eyes to see better in the piercing glare from the sharp angled sunlight. If only he'd had the Jumper! Baines had relieved him of all equipment that could either brake or cause harm to anyone, as soon as they had left the basecamp four days earlier, 'just in case', Morgan mimicked with a sour grimace. Even his Mag-Pro! - O.K. So he had panicked and shot Baines'es precious parameter-system to hell, but who wouldn't have, when someone was shooting arrows at you through the fog, and penal-colonists were attacking? Morgan defended himself, as he filled his canteen with water, and started heading for the metal object. Â«This better be worth it!Â» He grumbled, as he carefully descended the crumbling steep, and trudged along in the heavy sand. Â«It better be the supply-pod we're looking for! Filled with food, new clothes, equipment...Â» His uplifting thoughts spurred him on, and he lost himself to his daydreams, as usual. Half an hour or so later, he arrived at the other side of the basin, struggling his way through the loose sand up the slope, towards the ridge, looking for the metal object. There it was. Half buried in the soft ground. Â«An escape-pod.Â» He sighed, halfways disappointed. Then it hit him; who ever had been in that thing, could still be there, one way or the other! Muttering to himself, he carefully scanned the ground around the pod. It was covered with bootprints. So, who ever it was, was human and had survived the crash, and was still in the area. At least he would not find a corpse, then. Nervously, Morgan took a few hesitant steps towards the pod, all senses alert. Â«Hello?Â» He carefully called, taking a quick peek inside the pod. No one there. A sigh of relief escaped him, and he searched the place more carefully with his eyes. The pod looked as if someone was still living in it. Some fresh roots and fruits was stacked in one seat, and some smoked meat hung in strips from the ceiling. Several cans of water served as a makeshift table by the wall, and a homemade cooking pot stood right inside the door. clothes and other nic-nacs littered the whole place. The occupant was obviously male. Morgan backed silently out of the pod, sealing the door after him, scanning his surroundings. Hopefully it was a survivor from the crash, and not a penal-colonist. The footprints around the pod went in all directions, but at the back, they gathered in a clearly often used track. His curiosity still in charge of his feet, Morgan decided to follow the path a little further, but first, he'd better warn Baines and Walman that there might be company in the area. He reached for his gear in his pocket. It was empty! Panic started to rise inside of him, and Morgan took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. Â«Check the other pockets, moron.Â» He chided himself, but knew it would give the same result as he frantically rummaged through every thinkable place in his clothes. He had lost his gear! Â«O.K. I'll just follow my own tracks, and walk back the way I came!Â» He said out loud, heading towards the ridge

where he had arrived from. "It's a piece of cake. Just follow your own footprints, back to the river..." It took him most of the rest of the after-noon to get back to the brook, and he made shure to pick up some of the firewood on his way back. They probably wouldn't believe him when he told them about the life-pod, though. They'd just say he was making it up as an excuse for being gone so long. But he'd show them. He wouldn't say a thing about it tonight, but tomorrow he'd lead them right back there, sort of 'by accident', and he'd show them. Lost to thoughts again, he arrived at the camp site. It was empty! They were gone! He dropped his bundle of firewood, and just stood there, goping. They had left him behind!? There were marks and footprints on the ground telling him he was at the right site, but Baines and Walman were gone, and they had left him alone, without food or protection of any kind. Morgan looked about him, frantically. The sun had nearly settled, and he was alone. Alone with the Grendlers! A twig snapped. His fear got the best of him, and he started running, back towards the life-pod. The only safeplace he could think of right now. A soft, shuffling sound behind him made him stop dead in his tracks, looking back, slowly. A group of two or three Grendlers were sniffing their way along his trail, heading in his direction. Probably looking for a juicy dinner! Finally giving in to total panic, Morgan turned around with a whimper, and ran away from them as fast as he possible he could in the loose sand of the basin.

It was getting darker when he came to his senses again, and he slumped down in the sand, exhausted. He cursed himself loudly. The only sensible thing to do, was ofcourse to get inside the life-pod, lock the door and wait 'till morning, when Baines and Walman would come looking for him. Instead, his mind had short-circuited, and sent him running witlessly into the desert! Now he was truly lost! Alone! Out doors! Alone! With the Grendlers and the Kobas and the Terrians... And it was getting darker and darker. Panic threatened to overcome him again, and he closed his eyes, taking deep breaths, cursing the feeling he seemed never to get rid of. It had almost always been there. Ever since he was a small boy. Taking charge of him, leaving him a helpless victim to his own actions and reactions. He always seemed to do the opposite of what he wanted to, - or should, do. There wasn't anything in this world he was more ashamed of than this cowardly helplessness. He still had nightmares of how he had hi-jacked the life-pod, leaving the others behind to fend for them selves, saving himself and Bess. In his dreams he saw himself as a greedy, sniveling monster, only looking out for himself, always looking for profit, always trying to take credit for things he didn't do, stepping on others to get to his goals... A full-blooded bureaucrat, indeed! "It's not your fault, Morgan. You were made that way. It's not you, it's them." He startled, as he heard Bess'es voice comforting him. Woken from his half-dream of self-pity, he realized he was not alone. The Grendlers! He got to his feet, looking about him for a escape. In the dwindling light, a square shadow sat atop of a nearby hill, and he headed for it instinctively. "Square is manmade." He whispered breathless, stumbling over roots and rocks, making his way towards the object. In the last light of the day, he saw it was a supply-pod! Intact! He had found it! Enthused by his find, he forgot his peril for a few seconds as he walked around the giant pod, dragging his hand along it's sides, as if he couldn't believe his luck. A whole pod! And he had found it! The Grendlers snarled in the rapidly thickening darkness behind him, reminding him, and he quickly found his way round to the door. "Oh, no. Digi-Lock. It's coded." He looked closer. Someone had tried to break the lock

open with a rock it seemed. He bent down, panicly searching the ground, and found the rock. He banged it futively against the metal, knowing that it would not yield. Wait a minute. He had been part of designing the codes for these locks... Perhaps... He dropped the rock, and started pressing the buttons instead. It crackled, hissed, blinked, but then came to life, lighting up. "The code. I've got to find the code." Morgan worked frantically, with fear-numbed fingers, as the Grendlers seemed to come closer and closer behind him. He could more feel it than see it, as it had become quite dark by now, and his only source of light was the dim, green glow from the lock. A dry twig snapped behind him, and he near fainted with fear. "I'm dead!" He gasped. All of a sudden, it was as if his brain made a jump to a higher level, leaving him in a calm. Like a computer, it scanned all the multitudes of solutions at once, and in less than a heartbeat had delivered the right code, having his fingers punching it. Morgan just goped. He could actually see how his brain worked, before his inner eye; See how it scanned along a billion of silky threads at the same time, homing in on the right one, setting his fingers into action at the same instant. How slow everything seemed to move around him? It seemed to be close to standing still. And his own moves seemed to be in slow motion. The pod-door opened with a hiss, and he tumbled inside, locking it securely behind him; his perception back to normal again. He sat on the floor in the darkness, heaving in the dusty air, shaken by the experience. Then slowly, he started to search the darkness around him, looking for the torch he knew would be stored just inside the door. Once he got some light, he'd feel better, seeing all the familiar things around him. Turning on the torch, he looked around. This pod was stowed by regulations, so he had no problem finding a stack of blankets and some food. Luckily he still had more than half a canteen of water. He settled himself for the night, just inside the door, curled up on the stack of blankets, and fell into a exhausted, restless sleep, trying not to think about the Grendlers lurking outside.

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